

THE BLUEPRINT:

Building a Business Assistance Network for Farm and Food Businesses



Executive Summary

The Blueprint seeks to increase the number of successful farm and food businesses in New England and the Hudson Valley.

The agricultural sector is undergoing major structural shifts as a result of consolidation, dwindling farmland, aging farmer population, and concerns about negative social and environmental impacts of industrial agriculture. The American Farmland Trust and Land for Good have found that nearly 30% of New England's farmers are likely to exit farming in the next 10+ years. Meanwhile, demand for local, ecologically-sound food is increasing rapidly as consumers, policy-makers, and advocates seek to support local and regional food systems and rural economies.

Current and aspiring farmers and food business owners face significant barriers in accessing land, capital, and markets, and in developing viable business models. These barriers present particular obstacles for historically-marginalized groups such as people of color, women, and low-income individuals. Access to business technical assistance – whether educational programs or business advisors – is a foundational support system for agricultural entrepreneurs with businesses at all stages and scales, to help ensure and farm and food businesses are economically viable and successful. There is not consistent support available to help farmers and food business operators develop long-term economic viability.

To address these challenges in New England and New York's Hudson Valley, representatives from over 50 organizations that work with farm and food businesses, ranging from direct service providers, agricultural extension services, foundations, advocacy organizations and policymakers, came together in 2017 to develop a strategy to create *The Blueprint*.

The Blueprint report outlines a plan to meet three primary objectives:

1. Cultivate a pipeline of business advisors to advise agricultural entrepreneurs across all business stages, scales, types, and populations throughout the region.
2. Develop a strong interstate network that provides professional development, networking, and advocacy opportunities for business technical assistance providers.
3. Secure sufficient funding and other resources to ensure access to one-on-one business technical assistance across the New England and Hudson Valley regions.

The Blueprint is guided by an Executive Committee including The Hudson Valley AgriBusiness Development Corporation, the Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program, and The Carrot Project; a Steering Committee; and Working Groups.

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To learn more and read the report, visit thecarrotproject.org/sector_development/the_blueprint, or contact Anna Larson at blueprint@thecarrotproject.org.